"He was jammed against the door-casing, with Costello's elbow against his throat and Costello's hand wrenching his wrist. 'Drop it! Drop it!' said Costello."

and frowning at the wall. "Not that she's to blame, either! We didn't know what he was, any more than she did. I didn't like him, but supposed he'd make her a fairly decent sort of husband. The real objection was her age—just over seventeen. But the Italians marry young, you know. I had no idea what he was myself—so she's not to blame! He's a dog. Insanely jealous—that kind, you know. It makes life hell for a woman. She's stood it a year now; but it gets worse all the time. It's really a form of insanity, you know," he added soberly—still twisting his mustache, and with the line down his forehead. "He threatens to kill her and her mother, and all that. She lives in terror of him—hardly dares to look at the milkman or the grocer's boy. But nothing does any good. He's a half-breed—a crazy brute!"

"Why doesn't she leave him?" I suggested, not knowing anything else to say.

"That's the trouble; she's afraid even to do that," he replied. "Of course they're Catholics. That counts, too. There never could be a divorce. Her mother—Mrs. Durante, you know—is afraid of him, too. That's why she changed floors with me. She feels safer on the third floor, with me below."

HE puckered his brows still more deeply. "It's a hard problem; hard to know what to do. Of course, I could deal with him. He's just a mad dog, you know. I'd as lief deal with him as not. But there are the women to be considered. A great row and scandal wouldn't do them any good. It's a hard problem."

It seemed so hard that I cared to venture no further suggestions—merely asking, "Do they live here?"

"Over in Newark," Costello replied. "He teaches music there—violin—and plays in a theater orchestra." He said it absently, his mind evidently upon something else. After a moment he looked up at the photographs.

"She used to toddle up to me, you know, when she was learning to talk—go to sleep in my arms. I watched her all along. She grew up in my heart. It comes hard, you see, to sit still and see this go on." He seemed to puzzle deeply over it, as over an intricate problem in mathematics. "I would take it in hand—but there are the women," he added, as much to the fireplace as to me.

Well, at last there was something that looked like romance—this man's deep affection for a babe slowly grown to womanhood and now most unhappy. I turned again to the photographs. In the light of what I had heard, the middle one was suddenly more appealing, with its oval face, eloquent eyes, and a smile trembling on the gracious lips.

I THINK the subject was not mentioned again for a week. Then Blanche came home. It was about ten o'clock in the morning, and I was correcting the typewritten sheets of my novelette. A bay-window took up nearly the whole front of my sitting-room; and I had pulled my writing-table into the window, for the day was dark. Something caused me to turn my head and look down into the street in time to see a taxicab wheel up to the curb and a woman with a suit-case spring out of it. She seemed in great haste. A moment later the door-bell began ringing. It rang twice; then persistently, without stopping, like a prolonged, anxious cry.

I knew Mrs. Durante sometimes went out to market at that hour. After a full minute, or perhaps more, I went down and threw open the door.

A pale, dark-eyed young woman started in; then, at sight of my strange face, wilted back against the door-post, a breathless image of fear. Terror shone in the depths of her eyes. Her lips parted, but the cry died in her throat. Her form shrank limply. She seemed on the point of fainting.

"Mrs. Durante has stepped out," I said. "I am a lodger here. Won't you come in and wait for her?"

By that time I knew she was the daughter; but I hope I should have felt compassion for any creature so extremely harried as she looked.

"Let me take your suit-case," I went on, with a wish to reassure her. "I am sure Mrs. Durante will be back soon."

She recovered somewhat then. I could see life revive in her eyes. She managed to murmur, "Thank you," and suffered me to take the suit-case. I carried it into the sitting-room, and said again I was sure Mrs. Durante would be back soon. She sank into a chair; murmured "Thank you" again, and even gave me a grateful look. I supposed she would be best alone, and started upstairs, yet lingered in the upper hall until I heard the landlady come in.

That brought me, so to speak, into the affair. Costello talked with me about it that evening—gravely and with that air of deep perplexity which this particular subject always brought upon him.

"Well, she's made a break for it," he said, sitting opposite me in my front room, with his legs crossed and both hands clasped over his elevated knee. "That's what I've really wanted her to do. If he's going to kill her, it might as well be here as over there. She'd never do it before—fear and the church, you know. I never really urged her, yet I hoped she'd do it. So finally she has left him."

He rocked himself a moment, frowning hard and pursing his lips.

"I wouldn't say what happened—that made her leave," he went on, with that absorbed air of trying to work out a puzzle. "It isn't a thing to be told."

He stopped rocking himself, lifted the right hand from his knee, and examined it attentively, opening and closing it as if curious to see how it worked.

"There's a black and blue mark on her throat," he added soberly. "You see, it's pretty hard. I may have to take it in hand myself. I wouldn't mind—only there's Blanche and her mother."

He said it unemotionally, and twisted his mustache.

"But if she's so afraid of him, why don't you have him locked up?" I put in.

"Ah, but on what ground?" he replied quickly, elevating his eyebrows. "You can't keep a man locked up simply because you're afraid of him, you know. The judge would want to know what grounds, and then no doubt would turn him loose. No; the law wouldn't do anything. That would only stir things up—get in the newspapers—make a scandal. The women wouldn't like that. Besides, you see, she's so afraid of him that she dare not make any move against him, for fear that would turn him crazier than ever.

"Frightened!" he repeated after a moment, pondering the ugly word with a furrow down his forehead. "All the life frightened out of her! Yes, he's killed my dove," he concluded, with a little sigh.

"Oh, well, he won't come around here," I consoled. "A man that chokes a woman is too big a coward to do anything but bluff. He'll never try to harm her here."

"That's what I tell them," Costello replied simply. "But I don't believe it myself. I know what sort he is. It's a kind of insanity, you know. I've seen a case of it before. You read about it in the newspapers every now and then. I think, myself, he'll come in a few days. Probably it will take the poison in him a few days to get up to the right pitch. That's why I wanted this talk with you, you see. We must at least look to our defenses."

THE remark gave me a rather unpleasant start. Taking a personal part in defense against a jealousy-crazed husband hadn't been what I reckoned on when I came to the still little house. But Costello explained:

"We mustn't let him sneak into the house, you know. You're going in and out, so I want you to keep your eye peeled. He's a little shorter than you are and a little heavier; smooth-shaven; a clear olive skin; black eyes; black curly hair; Grecian nose—a handsome chap. Probably he'll be very well dressed—usually is. If you see him lurking around here anywhere, just let me know. I'm going to stick around pretty close myself the next week. I can arrange it at the gymnasium all right for a week."

He reflected gravely upon the situation for a moment, and commented:

"I'm not much afraid of the front door. That's a strong spring lock. But there's the kitchen door and window. They're putting up a new building on the further side of the block, you know—back there on Dacia Street. A man could come in through the skeleton of the new building, and so into the little court and to our back door. I'll have to see to that," he meditated aloud. "Of course, you mustn't let a strange man into the house on any account."

In this way I came, so to speak, into the affair; and I saw at once that Costello let the landlady and her daughter know I was in it. Neither of them ever mentioned the subject to me then or at any later time; but in their dark eyes, their low voices, their whole manner toward me there was a subtle acknowledgment of me as a friend—especially on the daughter's part.

She glided about the little house, pale as when I first saw her at the door, and very nervous, as one could see by the swift turn of the head and widening of the eyes when she heard any noise. She was only a girl—a little past eighteen; graceful and lovely, with gracious lips meant for smiles, and eloquent eyes where something other than terror should have lived. I didn't care to try imagining what she had lived through this last year—that made Costello say, "He has killed my dove!" and sigh.

I NOTED the details of Costello's defensive strategy. The front door of the little house and the tiny vestibule and the inner door were painted black. In the inner door was a long panel of opaque leaded glass. Costello broke out one of the little leaded panes in the glass panel, perhaps two feet and a half above the floor. He kept the electric light in the ceiling of the tiny vestibule burning of evenings, while the light in the hall was turned out. Thus, if a summons came at the door either by day or night, one on the inside, by squatting and applying his eye where the little pane was broken out, could see who stood in the light vestibule.

I walked around to Dacia Street on the farther side of the block, and saw at once what he meant by his reference to that. The block was solidly built up on all four sides without an alley, in the regular New York fashion. So there was no access to the court except by going through a building. Now, however, one of the buildings on Dacia Street had been torn down. A new structure was going up in its place. So from Dacia Street one could walk through the skeleton of the new structure, through the court, and to our back door. I supposed Costello had put bars on the kitchen window and a stouter lock on the door, but I didn't ask or attempt to see.

Indeed, I couldn't take the situation as seriously as he did. When I looked around our dull little house, or along our shabby, commonplace street, I really couldn't imagine Tragedy leaping up in there, furious-eyed and red-handed. I felt pretty confident nothing would happen.

Days went by, and nothing did happen. Once, going downstairs, I saw Blanche in Costello's sitting-room, kneeling beside his chair, her face in her hands buried on his knee. One of his hands rested on her head; the other twisted his mustache; and there was the frowning, perplexed line down his forehead. Sad, of course, and poignant; but she was safe now; probably it would end presently, rather prosaically, in a divorce.

It was snowing, with hardly any wind, when I went to dinner Saturday. Entering the little restaurant where one could get a slice of roast beef, a baked potato, and a baked apple for thirty-five cents, I shook a thick powdering of flakes from my ulster and hat. The fall had increased when I came out. My feet sank noiselessly into the feathery white. The street lamps gave an odd illusion of floating upward through a dense swarm of white moths.

My feet went of themselves along the familiar route between the little res-